



Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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DECCAN BIRDERS EVENTS

In light of the Corona virus (COVID-19) epidemic, all Deccan Birders Field Trips and Indoor Meetings are on hold until further notice. Details of upcoming activities will be communicated once the situation improves.

Report: Visit to Yapral Lake, Secunderabad, January 26, 2020

Text and Photos: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao



Yapral Lake

Yapral Lake, located in the northern parts of Secunderabad (17 30 51N 78 32 32E), is a small water body not more than 20 acres in size. The lake, however, has been able to draw large flocks of birds this season, thanks to the abundance of rains during the last monsoon. The lake is witnessing some developmental work of late, like the creation of a high bund-cum-walkway to the east, a cemented drain all around, and a plantation of the Indian Date Palms to retain the bund itself. The lake retains the monsoon rainwater briefly for 4-5 months each year. In the past 10 years the lake has seen full water level only on three occasions including the current season.

I live in Swarnandhra Colony, which is just a stone's throw from this lake. A lot of over-flights by Herons, Egrets, Ducks and Ibises near my house forced me to investigate on the status of the lake. To my pleasant surprise I found the Yapral Lake filled with varieties of birds and bustling with activities – like fishing, diving, wading, preening and nest building – like never before. I decided to go there day after day and motivated a couple of more enthusiasts to join me.

While the bird watching was enjoyable, the abuse of the lake and its surroundings by the locals with liquor bottles and plastic was distressing. We felt we had to do something to tidy up the place and Deccan Birders readily pitched in. The next

available holiday was January 26, 2020 (Republic Day) and what better way than to spend the morning hours in service of the Nation and Nature. So we decided on a 3-in-1 program – to carry out Bird Survey, the Asian Waterfowl Census and Swachh Bharat (clean up) of the lake and its surroundings. A message was sent around to the residents of the colonies adjoining the lake, to participate in the birdwatching, followed by cleaning of the lake. The response was positive and a lot of volunteers of all ages stepped up to participate in both the events.



Spot-billed Duck



Lesser Whistling-duck



Northern Shoveler

When the Deccan Birders members along with other volunteers reached the bund, they were happy to see the lake brimming with water and a large number of waterfowl. Spot-billed ducks, Lesser Whistling-ducks, Northern Shovelers, Common Coots, Glossy Ibises, Grey Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons, Common Sandpipers and various Cormorants were seen in large numbers.



Glossy Ibis



Black-crowned Night Heron



Grey Heron

A Eurasian Marsh Harrier was also camping at the lake on the Neem tree on the western edge of the lake, where I had seen it regularly hunting its breakfast every morning.



Eurasian Marsh Harrier

The northern part of the lake has a large number of Black Acacia Trees submerged in the water and thus presents an ideal haven for the birds for nesting. This area is relatively devoid of human movement and this increases the bird numbers. This area has been chosen by the Glossy Ibis, Grey Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Lesser Whistling-duck, Spot-billed Duck, Common Coot and Little Grebe for nesting and breeding.



Little Grebe with chick

Apart from this, it is heartening to see hundreds of Egrets, Ibises and Cormorants return to roost here every night. The calls of the Indian Nightjar and the Indian Thick-knee were heard from the lake side at night. About a dozen Garganey were observed in the lake from 25 Mar onwards post the AWC count and were seen well into April.



Blyth's Reed Warbler

The visit of the Blyth's Reed Warbler to the lake and the surroundings is an annual feature that happens with unfailing regularity. I have recorded, for the past 5-6 years, its arrival in the first week of November and departure by the last week of March of the following year. This year the departure is probably delayed owing to pleasant weather in the area and late arrival of the summer – as of April 11, 2020, the birds were still seen foraging around.



Clean-up activity in full swing

Coming back to our event, after the birdwatching wound down, we started the lake clean-up activity, and it was



Indian Golden Oriole

heartening to see one and all pitch their bit to get the lake in order. Change of gear happened in an instant. Cameras gave way to gloves and garbage bags. Children from Swarnandhra and Prakrutik Vihar colonies were leading the way and were quite a motivation for others to follow. By the end of the clean-up activity, we managed to fill up a GHMC truck which was requested by our Colony Administration in advance. After a quick wash up at the Katta Mysamma temple, sweets were distributed to all the participants.



The team

The range of flora and fauna in and around the lake is to be appreciated, considering the rate at which other water bodies and the environment are being abused by human intervention in and around the city. This lake too like all other water bodies in any urban environment is facing encroachment from all directions and shrinking in size. The problem is accentuated by release of untreated sewage by the surrounding colonies, thus polluting the lake waters. The bund of the lake offers a safe and convenient place for impromptu parties. Empty bottles and snack wrappers can be found on any given day over here. Kite flying, though an annual affair, adds its share of casualties around the lake. The arrival of the migratory birds to Yapral Lake every winter and the significance of protecting this water body was brought to the knowledge of our local MLA Sri M Hanumantha Rao during one of the post-flood meetings at our Swarnandhra Colony. We are hopeful that this lake continues to flourish and support local and migratory birds in times to come.

Some other photos taken at Yapral Lake:



Thick-billed Flowerpecker



Oriental White-eye



Blue-faced Malkoha



House Sparrow



Cattle Egret caught in kite 'manja'



Purple Sunbird female feeding chick



Black-headed Ibis



Indian Chameleon



Oriental Darter



Green Bee-eater



Indian Robin female feeding chick



Grey-bellied Cuckoo



Common Hawk Cuckoo



Coppersmith Barbet



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher



Indian Silverbill



Yellow-billed Babbler



Pied Bushchat male

Birds of Yapral Lake and Surroundings	
(Observations between Oct 2019 and Apr 2020)	

SI #	Species Name	SI #	Species Name	SI #	Species Name
1	Spotted Dove	36	Indian Golden Oriole	71	Rosy Starling
2	Blue Rock Pigeon	37	White-breasted Waterhen	72	Chestnut-tailed Starling
3	Asian Koel	38	Shikra	73	Oriental Honey Buzzard
4	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	39	Oriental White-eye	74	Greenish Warbler
5	Common Hawk Cuckoo	40	Green Bee-eater	75	Lesser Whitethroat
6	Jacobin's (Pied Crested) Cuckoo	41	Spotted Owlet	76	Lesser Whistling-duck
7	Common Iora	42	Black Kite	77	Great Cormorant
8	House Crow	43	Jungle Crow	78	Little Cormorant
9	Indian Robin	44	Cattle Egret	79	Oriental Darter
10	Oriental Magpie Robin	45	Little Egret	80	Indian Cormorant
11	Pied Bushchat	46	Intermediate Egret	81	Barn Swallow
12	Indian Grey Hornbill	47	White-breasted Kingfisher	82	Asian Palm Swift
13	Rufous Treepie	48	Common Kingfisher	83	Little Swift
14	House Sparrow	49	Indian Pond Heron	84	Wire-tailed Swallow
15	Baya Weaver	50	Striated Heron	85	Red-rumped Swallow
16	Scaly-breasted Munia	51	Grey Heron	86	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
17	Indian Silverbill	52	Purple Heron	87	Red-wattled Lapwing
18	Ashy Prinia	53	Black-crowned Night Heron	88	Asian Openbill
19	White-browed Wagtail	54	Rose-ringed Parakeet	89	Red-naped Ibis
20	Grey Wagtail	55	Plum-headed Parakeet	90	Glossy Ibis
21	Citrine Wagtail	56	Black Drongo	91	Black-headed Ibis
22	River Tern	57	Indian Peafowl	92	Common Sandpiper
23	Purple Sunbird	58	Grey Francolin	93	Common Moorhen
24	Purple-rumped Sunbird	59	Indian Thick-knee	94	Purple Swampphen
25	Common Tailorbird	60	Indian Nightjar	95	Common Coot
26	Southern Coucal	61	Verditer Flycatcher	96	Little Grebe
27	Coppersmith Barbet	62	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	97	Northern Shoveler
28	Red-vented Bulbul	63	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	98	Garganey
29	White-browed Bulbul	64	Asian Brown Flycatcher	99	Spot-billed Duck
30	Common Myna	65	Small Minivet	100	Black-winged Stilt
31	Brahminy Starling	66	Black-winged Kite	101	Indian Peafowl
32	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	67	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	102	Eurasian Marsh Harrier
33	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	68	Black Redstart	103	Black-rumped Flameback
34	Yellow-billed Babbler	69	Brown Shrike		
35	Blue-faced Malkoha	70	Blyth's Reed Warbler		

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*)



Asian Openbill (Kolleru, January 2, 2020)

Order: Ciconiiformes
Family: Ciconiidae
Genus: *Anastomus*
Species: *A. oscitans*
Size: 68-76 cm

Description & distribution: The Asian Openbill is a large stork and is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. The head, upperparts, neck and underparts are predominantly white (in breeding season) or smoky greyish (in non-breeding season), while the wings and tail are glossy black with a greenish or purple sheen. It has a strong horn-grey or reddish-black beak, with an arched upper mandible and a recurved lower mandible; this gap between the mandibles is what gives the bird its name. The cutting edges of the mandibles have a fine brush-like structure that is believed to give them a good grip on the outer shells of snails, although young birds, which do not yet have this gap, are also able to feed on snails. As a result, there are some authorities that question this belief regarding the exact function of the gap between the mandibles. The legs are short and pinkish or greyish, but can turn reddish prior to breeding. Young birds are usually more brownish-grey.

The Asian Openbill is found in most parts of Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia.

Habitat & behaviour: The Asian Openbill is seen occasionally singly, but usually in small to large flocks, in inland wetlands, agricultural fields, lakes, irrigation canals and seasonal marshes, and is not usually seen on river banks, tidal flats or coastal areas. Flocks can move widely depending on habitat conditions – for instance, some ringed birds have been spotted

in Bangladesh, as far as 1500km away from Thailand, where they were ringed. They are broad-winged soaring birds and small groups can often be seen soaring on thermals and dropping rapidly into their feeding grounds. Groups often forage together in the preferred foraging spots like shallow water, marshy ground or flooded fields. Besides water snakes, frogs and large insects, its diet mainly consists of large molluscs, especially freshwater snails (*Pila* species) – it inserts the tip of its beak into the shell of the snail, and extracts the body with the bill still under water. In fact, Jerdon had noted that it was able to capture snails even while blindfolded. The theory that the bill gap is used as a nutcracker was originally proposed by Sir Julian Huxley, but has since been disproved. Also, while the brush-like edges of the mandibles supposedly give it a better hold on slippery shells, the fact that young birds without the gap are still able to forage on snails, is not explained. Some current schools of thought hold that the gap may give the bird the ability to strike at a better angle and apply more force on the snail shells. Smaller snails, however, are often crushed or swallowed whole. It is a noisy bird, especially while flying in flocks, with a constant hubbub being clearly audible. Its call is a mournful *hoo hoo*.

Nesting: The Asian Openbill breeds after the rains, and therefore, generally between July and September in Northern India and Nepal, and between November and March in Southern India and Sri Lanka. In drought years it may skip breeding entirely. It is a colonial breeder, building a rough platform of sticks and twigs on half-submerged trees (e.g. *Barringtonia*, *Acacia* or *Avicennia*). These trees are usually shared with several other species like Painted Storks, Egrets, Cormorants, Darters, Herons, etc. Since the nests are crowded together on these trees, there are often quite aggressive and vocal interactions between neighbouring birds. Like most

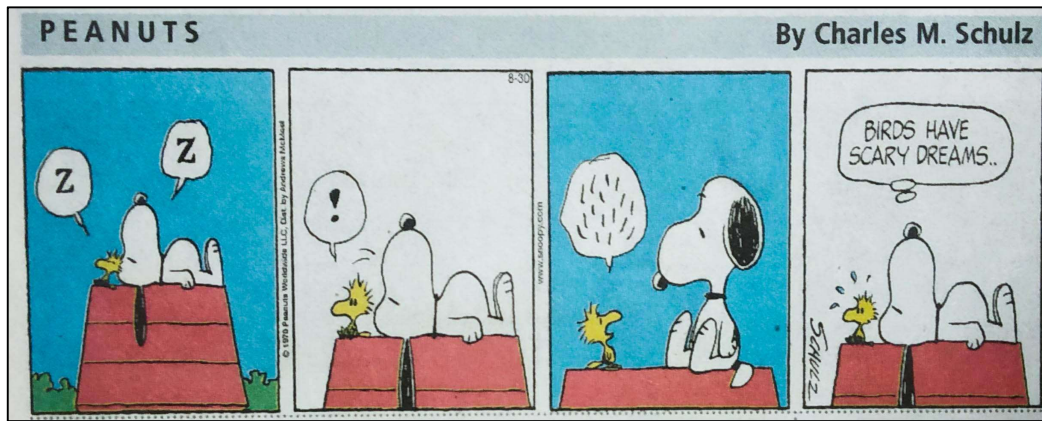
Storks, the birds are usually silent, except for the clacking of bills between pairs during mating, and the low honking sounds accompanied by up-and-down movements of the bill when greeting a partner arriving at the nest. The usual clutch consists of 2-4 white eggs. Both parents share incubation duties, and once the chicks emerge, they are often shaded by loosely spread wings of the parent.

Local name: The Asian Openbill is known as 'Ghungil', 'Gungla' or 'Ghonghila' in Hindi, 'Galu konga' in Telugu, 'Naththai kuththi narai' in Tamil, and 'Cherakokkan' in Malayalam.

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(From The Times of India, September 20, 2017)

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